

# THE CORRESPONDENT.

MAGNA EST VERITAS ET PREVALEBIT.

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

### ON HISTORICAL EVIDENCE.

Continued.

17. I believe I have already noted that in proportion as a fact is in itself credible because conformable to human experience under the circumstances connected with it, the weight of testimony necessary to establish it, is less. In proportion as a fact is in opposition to human experience, the weight of evidence necessary to establish it, must be greater. For the analysis of the problem, results in this; is it more improbable that the fact should be true as related, or that the witnesses should be deceived, or should have some motive for deceiving. (1. Stark. 471) Wherever a very extraordinary fact is related, even by concurrent testimony, we are to consider whether the witnesses had any bias of self interest or family interest, or any party purpose, of religion or politics to serve. For, such sources of incorrectness, as we know from long, indeed from constant, and universal experience, are very apt to stand in the way of truth, and tempt to forgery, falsehood, and fraud. Take for examples, the Sibilline prophecies, the miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus, or the miracles of the three first centuries of the Christian church: take in more modern times any of the popish legends, or take the miracles at the tomb of the abbe St. Paris, those within these few years performed at St. Winifred's well, published by Dr. Miller, or the miracles of prince Hohenloe. We see clearly the temptation, and the resulting deception in all these cases. The testimonies to the death and resurrection of Christ, are liable to a similar objection: there is not one disinterested witness specified. All his disciples lived at their ease, upon this lucrative story, maintained in plenty, and respected by their ignorant and credulous followers. Even his brothers and sisters who disbelieved and ridiculed his pretensions before he was put to death, joined his travelling disciples, and lived at their ease on Christian credulity after his decease. "Have we not," says St. Paul (1. Cor. ix. 5) "power to eat and drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, or wife, as well as the other apostles, and as the brethren of our lord? and Cephas? or I only and Barnabas? If we spw unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing that we should reap of you carnal things?"

Men thus subsisting by an alleged imposture, are very suspicious witnesses to establish the truth of the facts denied. Would any court of justice let such evidence go to a jury?

I am fully aware of the difficulty attending the question, what is a miracle? I am aware that we must be very cautious in pretending to know the extent of the laws of nature. Thus, very many tricks of a juggler, appear to persons ignorant of the deception, to be miraculous. The king of Siam was half justified in rejecting the story of water becoming solid, as contrary to universal experience *in his climate and country*. Mr. Robinson, in his examination of the authenticity of the *Parian Chronicle*, (the Oxford or Arundelian marbles) states it as a conclusive objection, that they relate the impossible fact of a large stone falling from the heavens into the Egean sea: a fact, that since our attention has been drawn to meteorolites by M. Chladni, and Mr. Howard, nobody scruples to believe. As the diving bell, the baloon, the many strange modes of producing fire and flame by the chemical operation and intermixture of cold liquors, the firing of gunpowder by a drop of water by means of potassium, the conversion of potass into a metal like silver, the deceptions of phantasmagoria, &c. &c., would formerly have been rejected as fabulous even by sensible men, because not coincident with any one's anterior experience. Every step in the progress of knowledge decreases the number of facts that would formerly be regarded as miraculous, and renders them more credible than heretofore.

Still, there are innumerable facts which we know with sufficient certainty to transcend the powers of man and the observed laws of nature: and we have a right to say that the force of universal observation and experience would justify us in rejecting them at once, because no testimony of any dozen or other number of witnesses, can overcome the overwhelming weight of universal experience in every country and in all ages.

For instance, suppose witnesses were produced to prove that a man really dead and buried for four days, being dug up and touched with the relic of a saint of the holy Roman catholic church, was instantly brought up into full life, health, and activity—what number of witnesses would be required to prove this fact? Is 2 Kings, xii., 21 sufficient? Is the resuscitation of Lazarus, or of Jairus's daughter, any different?

The Rev. Mr. Forsyth, a man of taste, talent, and learning, in his remarks on Italy, p. 344, gives an account of a *withered Elm tree* in the Piazza del Duomo at Florence, being suddenly restored to vegetation by the body of saint Zenobio resting against its trunk. "This event happened when Florence was more populous than now, and the most enlightened city of Europe: it happened in the most public place of the whole town: in the presence of many thousands then attending the solemn removal of the saint from San Lorenzo to the cathedral. The event is recorded by cotemporary historians, and is inscribed on a marble column now standing where the tree stood. A column erected in the face of those very persons who saw the miracle performed, and who certainly if the miracle were false would not suffer so impudent a story to insult them." Why not Mr. Eustace? Would not every prudent person on such an occasion say what business is it of mine? Why should

I buffet a stone wall, and make myself the certain victim of clerical indignation and revenge by exposing this clever piece of priestcraft? Mr. Eustice says, this miracle puzzles him although he acknowledges it is exactly the same with the withered oak at Capera, which burst into leaf the instant Augustus set his foot on that Island! What man would be blockhead enough to convince a Neapolitan multitude that the loquafaction of the blood of St. Januarius was a clumsy trick? Would any body have been puzzled about the withered elm but a *clerical* narrator, like the Rev. Mr. Eustace?

Is there any ancient or modern relations so fully and completely authenticated as the miracles of the tomb of the Abbe Paris? I have two volumes (one in quarto with plates of the transactions) of these miracles and the *proces verbaux*. Yet the king ended the delusion at once;

De part le Roi: defense a Dieu,  
De faire miracles dans ce lieu.\*

So in the case of prince Hohenloe, when the pope began to blush for the publicity of these silly impostures, the prince could perform them no longer.

Produce as many ancient witnesses as you please for Pythagoras's golden thigh: will any assignable number suffice to substantiate the fact?

Suppose a man born blind should have his eyes anointed by another man with dirt and spittle, and then washing it off in a particular pond of water should instantly be restored to sight: what force of testimony would induce a reasonable man in the present day to believe this? I shall borrow a few ideas immediately from Dumont's *Preuves Judiciaires*: but I must refer the reader more particularly to v. I, p. 61, 74, 103. and v. 2. p. 231, 237 of that invaluable work, which no man wishing to be a lawyer on principle can dispense with.

Whenever a miraculous fact is presented and exhibited to a multitude of spectators, it is nothing but a dexterous deception—an apparent violation of a law of nature, where some circumstance is concealed, which when known would explain the whole, like the phantasmagoria of our public exhibitions.

Let us suppose, for instance, the permanent cure of some disease. This is open, you say, to judicial testimony; the witnesses can say whether the patient was ill, when, and at what time, on what occasion and in what manner he was treated and cured. No doubt all this can be testified. But what court of justice has the means, the criterion of distinguishing a natural from a miraculous cure? Moreover, there are six other considerations to be weighed before the miraculous cure can be ascertained. 1. Was there a real malady, or such a one as is pretended. The symptoms may be imaginary. 2. Was there any illness at all. 3. The illness may have been cured by other means than the pretended ones. 4. Or it may have passed away naturally. 5. Or it may be alleviated only, or suspended. 6. It may continue unalleviated, while a falsehood is told of its cure either by the patient or the operator.

\* The king commands that God shall not  
Work more miracles on this spot.

Unless all these points are accurately examined and ascertained, there is no certainty : now in what case has this ever been done ? In what case has due care and precaution been taken to remove all reasonable doubt or suspicion ? Has it been done in any Christian case, either of the four gospels or popish legends ? Never. Let me see such a case verified by a sufficient number of unexceptionable witnesses, with all precautions to remove fraud or error, and with all the forms that a court of justice deems absolutely necessary to arrive at truth. Without this last condition—by extra judicial testimony—taken *ex parte*—unconfronted—not cross examined—not observed upon—any case of witchcraft, or possession, might be, as in a crowd of instances they have been proved. What is it that has caused such an impression for so many ages of the truth of miracles, ghosts, apparitions, magic, witchcraft, &c. &c. ? It is that the more there is of this supernatural belief, the more necessary do the impostures of the priesthood become : the public are persuaded by the priests that all these things exist, and that religion is necessary to control or counteract them. How many persons would gladly disabuse mankind. But mankind will not be disabused. Mankind is an ass, says the Spanish proverb, who kicks those who endeavor to take off his paniers. Reason might combat these errors perhaps, but the people, persuaded by the priesthood, will not have them combated. Reason is accused of impiety and condemned to death. With what rancor—with what deep seated malignity is every attempt to correct superstition received in this country, at this moment ! How miserably ignorant and bigoted are even our own legislators in this most enlightened country upon earth !

Suppose a proof were offered that a person in their clothing well examined, being locked up in a room with thick and strong walls, the windows fully secured, and the door locked, bolted and barred with every precaution of security, and that there being really no aperture for escape, by the chimney or otherwise, yet that the person so confined, was seen a few minutes after, walking the streets a mile off. Would a judge be authorized to refuse receiving such testimony ? Assuredly : for the counter testimony of every one's experience that such a case could not, and never did happen with any one's knowledge or memory, would be too strong for any positive evidence in support of it to overthrow.

Whatever therefore is established as true, by the uniform experience and testimony of every sensible man every where, and in all time past and present, may reasonably be considered as unrefutable by any testimony to the contrary of a comparatively few persons, who are far more likely to be mistaken, or prejudiced, or to have some motive for deception, than the uniform and unprejudiced experience of mankind should prove to be fallacious and untrue. For such a supposition as this last destroys all reasonable ground of certainty in any case.

In fact, the history of the Christian church from the beginning to the present day, presents little else than a history of disgraceful quarrels of the most rancorous description ; and a series of falsehoods, unexampled in all the other pages of history. Pious frauds consecrated by the highest authority : false gospels, false documents, interpolations of ancient authors for the purpose of deception, false saints, false relics, false miracles, forged acts of councils, forged decretals, false donations, false reve-



lations, spectres and apparitions, preternatural communications, miraculous cures, and supernatural revivals and outpourings of the spirit upon ignorant men, and hysterical women, supported by the testimony of ancient fathers of the church, pontiffs, bishops, doctors, and holy men of the most popular sanctity, belonging to all manner of conflicting sects, and agreeing in nothing but the common duty of religious lying, forging, and inventing, to serve the interest of the priesthood, and promote the common cause of public deception.

As knowledge and information increases, all these theological contrivances lose their credit and efficacy. What miracle is performed or pretended, what ghost appears, who is bewitched at this day in London or Paris, or even in New-York, or Philadelphia? Priests and the priesthood, and pious frauds, are now confined in their operations and effect nearly to women and children; and the base wretches who enter our families, who work upon the irritable feelings of women and sick persons, who rob them of their property by false hopes, false promises and false fears, and who govern the men by means of the women and children, who always hold the ignorant in their power to stir them up in hatred against the wise, and who are accumulating funds and wealth for their unholy purposes far beyond the suspicion of those who do not examine modern facts—these avaricious and unprincipled deceivers will, according to present appearances, ultimately bring on the darkness and superstition of the middle ages. Why does not the legislature of New-York and of every other state pass a more main act? Because it is not easy to find a more deplorably ignorant and bigoted assembly—a more priest-ridden set of legislators, than the legislators of New-York.

*Primus in orbe deos fecit Timor.* Ignorance of natural causes begat terror: terror, superstition: superstition, priests and the priesthood: whose interests and unbending efforts are exerted to perpetuate the fear, the ignorance and the superstition that gave them birth. The experience of past times, and the unhesitating conviction of well informed men at the present day, render every pretended miracle, Christian, Mahomedan, and Pagan, utterly incredible; and imperiously demand not only strong testimony, but every precaution to be taken to prevent mistake, in proportion as any asserted fact is of an extraordinary character. All the modes of judicial investigation and precaution that can be applied, ought rigidly to be required in such a case.

19. Hence, no historian is worthy of credit, unless, in proportion as we can ascertain his opportunities of personal information as to the facts he relates, his character and standing in society, his freedom from bias, and all the usual sources of mistake, inaccuracy and deception. Where he relies on the testimony of others, in all cases of fact not intrinsically and antecedently credible, he ought faithfully to cite his authority that we may judge of that authority by the same rules we judge of himself. An author who does not accurately refer to his authorities, is evidence for no fact whatever; and ought to be banished from our libraries.

20. All historic authority is destroyed by manifest anachronisms as to dates, persons, and places, words and phrases. When Moses, the reputed author of the Pentateuch, which he had no means of writing, (37. Deut. 1 et seq.) among fifty instances of this kind, alludes to the times of

the kings of Israel and Judah—when Ezekiel, in his supposed prophecy, anterior to the captivity, alludes twice to that great man, the prophet Daniel, who was but about twelve years of age when the captivity happened—who can put faith in such authors, or give a moment's credit to their authenticity?

21. Let A be a narrator of a fact; he tells it to B, who tells it to C, who tells it to D. All these amount to but one witness, viz. A. No evidence of a fact is strengthened by such a series and succession of derivative testimony. But if A, B, C and D, each of them testify to the same fact from their own separate observation, without communication with each other, the testimony is strong in proportion to the number of such separate witnesses testifying independently of each other. If they agree in all the general, leading, and important features of the transaction, their testimony is not much vitiated by their disagreement as to minute particulars which will admit of being observed differently. But, all the sources of false information, apply to each of them; and are to be so applied.

22. In transmitted and hearsay evidence, every fresh hand through which the narration passes, increases the chances of mistake, and deprives us of weighing the testimony to such a degree, that veracity and accuracy are annihilated altogether after half a dozen transmissions.

Such are the principal canons that bear upon historical evidence generally. They constitute a set of rules for judging of the value of historical evidence, that are founded on common sense, and every day's practice and experience in judicial proceedings. These are strictly applicable to the subject, for whether a man professes to tell truth by word of mouth, or to write it down for our information, the means of deciding whether it be truth or falsehood that he tells us, are the same. It may be said that if such strictness be applied to past history, the value of it will be nearly annihilated, and so it ought to be. I have no belief in any historical fact beyond 500 years anterior to our christian era, for reasons which an anonymous author of considerable acuteness and research already alluded to, has assigned. And of all subsequent history, from Herodotus to the last historian, I believe tree-fourths worthless. I would ask the reader to peruse Mr. Richardson's preface to his Persian Dictionary as to the histories of Alexander the Great, and the expedition of Xerxes, or the discrepancies in French and English accounts of the same historical transactions. History is only of use for the conclusions we can draw from it, applicable to passing and future events. But from dubious facts, what useful conclusions can be drawn? The Augustan age of history has not yet arrived; and will not arrive, till readers are taught how to judge and discriminate, as well as read.

PHILO VERITAS.

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PRIEST IN GLASGOW, TO THE DOCTOR IN LONDON.

I received your letter on the 24th of August, and though to reply to it must trespass on time required for studies, in which I am ardently engaged, I shall, nevertheless, for a little, leave the fair field of investigation on which I have been for some time expatiating, for the more thorny one of controversy.

You give at the outset a very lamentable picture of a religionist. You first describe him as a "being lost to the dictates of reason!" This is exceedingly modest! The sagacious Boyle, the acute and judicious Locke, the sublime Newton; these exalted souls, with innumerable other worthies, the ornaments not only of their country, but of their race, were lost to the dictates of reason. This I say again is exceedingly modest. You farther tell us, that a religionist continually crouches under the yoke of priests. Where did you draw the picture of a religionist? In a land of Brahmins, or of Dervises, or of monks and friars. It is no picture of the innumerable enlightened thinkers, who embraced religion from personal conviction and own no human authority in matters of faith, and whom it was strange that you should overlook, when you penned the sentence on which I am animadverting, or whom, if you did not forget, stranger still, that the remembrance of them did not blot from your pages the insinuation that a religionist is a creature that continually crouches under priests.

You call faith a bugbear. Yes, to the faithless it is a bugbear; to those who may have reason to bear the terrors of a judgment, faith is a bugbear. Enemies to faith, faith cannot but be an enemy to them. But to the sincere servant of God, conscious of ardent endeavor to fulfill his commandments, and animated with love to him, what sublimer idea can there be, than that of an eternal, infinite, intelligent power, the fountain of all existence, and the sovereign of worlds; what dearer idea than that such a being is a father, is his father; and what more inspiring than the prospect of an eternity of glory and of bliss beyond the grave.—The thought that his existence instead of being that little span which extends to the grave and no farther, is merely the first step of a career glorious above "what eye hath seen, or ear hath heard, or hath entered into the heart of man to conceive," and boundless as eternity. If you can take more pleasure in worshipping motion than the living God. If the God motion can be dearer to you than God the father, or if the gloomy prospect of everlasting forgetfulness; if the prospect of the everlasting vanishment of your spirit like a vapor can cheer you more than the assurance of immortality, I must be at a loss to ascertain the cause of such a phenomenon, if not permitted to ascribe it to one which charity forbids me to mention.

Besides, I may ask, has the atheist never his fears as well as the religionist? Is he so sure of his atheism, and has he so conclusively demonstrated the groundlessness of religion, that he can entertain no fears at any time of a God whom he professes to deny, and a futurity at which he professes to laugh? Ah! let his own bosom answer the question. If incapable of such fears, his nature must be miraculously constituted; and while he denies miracles he himself is a miracle.

You say, that in pleading, that to God nothing is impossible, I have betaken myself to "the dernier resort of all theologians when baffled by arguments which are incontrovertible." I am not conscious of having met with such arguments in your letters. But with respect to this last resort of which you speak, no maxim can be more just than that an almighty power is capable of working miracles—that a miracle is as easy to an almighty being as any occurrence in the common course of nature.



You may talk about the invariableness of the laws of nature? Do they bind the hands of the deity so as that he cannot perform a miracle. Surely there is nothing irrational in supposing that when the deity has an uncommon end to serve, he may accomplish it by uncommon means. The propagation of Christianity was an uncommon object, and required for its success uncommon events called miracles, which manifested God's patronage of Christianity. Now there can be nothing irrational in supposing that a wise God would accomplish such an object by such means, which were the only means and the wisest means by which it could be accomplished. We hear a great deal of talk about the "violation of the law of nature:" pray will you be so good as to tell me what law of nature could be violated in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? Was there a single cord of the machinery of nature broken by that event? Was there any thing put out of its place by it, or was the system of things in the smallest degree disjointed by it?

I see that still you would fain persuade me, that I have not argued the question fairly with you. If I have not, I must be strangely deceived. One thing is true, that if I have not argued well, you have not yet refuted my arguments. Have you yet proved that the apostles did not declare that they saw Jesus alive after he was dead and buried. Or have you yet proved that when they declared this, they declared a falsehood, the declaration was made in the certain prospect of rousing the prejudices of the world against them, and of incurring certain misery and death itself? Or have you yet explained how, if they were a body of impostors, they would ever think of selecting for the founder of their faith, one who died a death more ignominious than that which is in the present day inflicted by the hangman? Or have you yet explained how a man of talent, and of the most violent prejudices against Christianity, could all on a sudden abandon Gamaliel, disappoint the hopes of his friends, incur the hatred of almost his whole countrymen, to whom he was enthusiastically attached, become the brother and apostle of the despised sect, which he hated with the most rancorous inveteracy, and run in the face of the most direful persecutions; have you yet, I say, explained this on any ground more rational than that of the fact that he really saw and heard the voice of the Jesus whom he persecuted? Or, if admitting the honesty of the apostles of Jesus, have you proved that nevertheless their testimony had no foundation? Have you proved that Jesus did not really die, and that he rose only by the recurrence of the smothered but not extinguished spark of life? Had you done this, you would have done much. But this you have not done, nor any of the things which I have mentioned. You have not proved, that he whose body had before crucifixion been exhausted by a sorrow, which wrung from his pores a blood like sweat, and had been scourged and buffeted, one through whose side a spear was thrust, to the effusion of blood and water; one who after being suspended on the cross for several hours exhibited so clearly all the symptoms of death, that even the malice of his enemies exempted him from the customary practice on such occasions of breaking the legs of the criminal; one, after all this, consigned to a cold sepulchre under the custody of a Roman guard, where if life had really lingered in his body, it would soon have departed; you have not proved that such a one could sponta-



neously revive. You have brought forward no counter-evidence of any signs of life in the crucified Jesus, though his malicious enemies must have been exceedingly sharp in detecting them. Moreover, you have not explained how Jesus came to surrender so cheerfully his life on any other ground than that of his sincerity, his piety and benevolence, the truth of his pretensions. You have not explained how the matchless character of Jesus, as described in the evangelists, could be compatible either with imposture or enthusiasm on his part, or on the part of those who describe it—how such a matchless character, a character so superior to every thing in history, could be the character of an impostor, or could be written by any but such as had seen the real original picture. All this and much more you have not done, and therefore you have but little reason to triumph.

*To be continued.*

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## **SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1829.**

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### **PREVALENCE OF LIBERAL OPINIONS.**

Power is frequently made the rule of right by the oppressors of mankind. The armed and mighty monarch sometimes condescends to talk of divine and hereditary warrant to tyrannize over the sons of men ; but his most potent argument is his physical amount of strength, and the number and devotion of his military adherents. Too often does it happen that the eyes of men are dazzled by the display of power ; and the crimes of a successful leader are consecrated as virtues by the misjudging multitude. They "try the Cæsar or the Catiline by the true touchstone of desert—success," and bow down in meek submission to the authority of their fellow-man, merely because he has succeeded in oppressing others. Their minds, as well as their bodies, become enslaved, and the reign of despotism is thus extended and perpetuated.

It is so with religious domination : the priest, as well as the soldier, commands men to submit to the doctrines sanctioned by the belief of multitudes ; and the prevalence of such belief is cited as a convincing argument of its truth. The despot occasionally is compelled to repress the rising spirit of freedom. Some patriot chieftains have always arisen at intervals, calling on their countrymen to strike for liberty. That summons is rarely answered by the body of the people ; and the few who battle with the tyrant and his slaves, are too often overborne by numbers, and perish in the unequal struggle. The oppressor rises stronger from crushed rebellion, and imputes his victory to the favor of heaven. His hireling writers point to the issue of the contest as indicative of the divine will, and as demonstrating the futility of all attempts to free the nations.

So argues the priest likewise : the same yielding and uninquiring disposition which has made men slaves to kings, operates to bind them in the fetters of superstition ; and because they have been so for ages, and will not be aroused *en masse* to vindicate their mental rights, therefore, says the priest, Christianity cannot be overturned ; and as it has continued to be regarded with reverence heretofore, so will it be to the end of time. As he waxes zealous in the discussion, he anticipates with holy confidence the permanence of his craft, and exclaims with an indignant disre-

gard of fact and logic, "Have not all the efforts of Voltaire, D'Alembert, Gibbon, Hume, Paine, and other infidels, in their unholy warfare against the religion of Christ been attended with failure? And if such powerful writers have attacked it in vain' is not this a proof of its indestructibility, as well as a warning to inferior antagonists that their opposition is fruitless?" The illogical conclusion from assumed premises, is answered by the question in the affirmative; and he proceeds with great complacency to advise all persons whatsoever to submit silently to the dominant creed.

Now, the assertion that the writings of the philosophers alluded to have been unsuccessful when directed against Christianity, possesses about as much truth as the generality of statements made by churchmen. At the present day the works of these authors are read, and their opinions are prevalent in every part of Christendom. No one can peruse a volume of modern travels on the continent of Europe, or pay the least attention to the facts developed in the numerous journals of Great Britain, without being convinced that such is the case. The most intelligent and well informed persons throughout all the states of Italy, are undeniably deists. The most enlightened individuals in Portugal and Spain—those who attempted to introduce constitutional government into those countries, and failed because of the ignorance and bigotry of the mass of the people, are known to have been liberal in their religious opinions, and to have been hated by the priesthood on that account.

France is eminently deistical at the present moment—perhaps more so than at the commencement of the revolution; for education is much more extensively diffused through her provinces than it was at that epoch. Every one knows that the great majority of the educated young men—the new generation that has sprung up since the downfall of the republic—have imbibed the opinions of their illustrious encyclopedists, and view with loathing and contempt the efforts of the Jesuits to bring back their country to the exploded belief of former ages. The order of Jesuits in modern France may be compared to the presbyterians in our own country. The same officiousness in regard to the concerns of other people's souls—the same intolerance towards other modes of belief than their own—and the same engrossing desire to seize on the temporalities of this world in furtherance of their *holy* designs, characterize both orders, and require unceasing vigilance on the part of the friends of freedom. It is gratifying to know that the enlightened portion of the French people—the physicians and advocates more especially, and great numbers of the middle classes—are united in their opposition to the schemes of the Jesuits, and prompt in defeating their iniquitous designs. No additional proof need be required of the true state of public sentiment in France, than the rapid sale of successive editions of the works of her philosophical writers; and it will be a difficult task to persuade us that the perusal of hundreds of thousands of copies of such works does not indicate the prevalence of anti-christian sentiments, and insure the ultimate downfall of the fabric of superstition.

How stands the case in Germany? and what says the Christian when he marks the consequences of the undaunted spirit of enquiry which is springing up among this metaphysical people? Every one knows that

a vast majority of the students at the German universities are emancipated from the thralldom of superstition ; and it is easy to calculate their influence on the other parts of the community. But the most unpalatable fact of all, is that the protestant *clergy*—ay, even the clergy—have eaten of the forbidden fruit of knowledge, and threaten to aid in demolishing the system which they were hired to defend. Some late publications, by German *divines*, on the authenticity of the scriptural books, shed a flood of light on the extent of their belief, and have struck terror among their more orthodox brethren in other countries. The conductors of British religious journals do not hesitate to charge them with downright *Deism*! and hold up their holy hands in pious horror, as they expatiate on the enormity of the crime!

In the more northern parts of Europe, we cannot look for much light in regard to religious belief, any more than with respect to political freedom. The degraded serf cannot think or reason, and he believes implicitly whatever his priest inculcates. But with respect to the small portion of persons who have read and travelled, the case is widely different ; and none despise more than they the dogmas of a puerile superstition.

Great Britain, notwithstanding her boast of mental superiority over the nations of the continent, is yet priest ridden in a considerable degree ; and the prosecutions against the publishers of deistical books, reflect disgrace on the country of Sydney and of Locke. But the number of those who disbelieve the religion which is thus made “part and parcel of the law of the land,” has certainly not been diminished by these severities. Persecution has become odious in these latter times, and as its exercise denotes weakness and apprehension, so does it arouse men to reflect and examine. The very denunciations of “infidelity,” which teem in English books and papers, serve to show that the assumed evil has spread far and wide, and is confined to no particular order of the community. The faith cannot be very firmly fixed in the minds of the people, since their spiritual leaders take so much pains to fortify and strengthen it. The establishment in London of a new university, in which the study of *theology* is for the first time dispensed with, as forming no part of useful education, speaks well for the intellect of the age ; and the angry clamors of bigots against the eminent individuals at its head, show full well that they regard it as a fearful weakening of the buttresses by which *the faith* has heretofore been supported.

In our own country, the advancement of liberal opinions has kept pace with the progress of education, and bids fair to liberate the minds of thousands from the influence of infantile prejudice. The establishment of free presses, and the public discussion of the merits of religion, are of recent origin in the United States, and must certainly be attended with beneficial effects. The uneasiness of the believers, and their strong desire to avoid all controversy on the subject, serve to denote their fears and feebleness. Their advantages in wealth and influence are more than counterbalanced by the nature of the cause they would sustain ; and they evidently anticipate with alarm the issue of the contest.

Such is a brief and accurate statement of the present condition and prospects of the christian religion, in the countries where its votaries are



most numerous. The facts are known to every person who has been in the habit of observing the spirit of the times, and no candid man would undertake to deny them. The conclusion is, that so far from the writings of unbelievers being unattended with effects, they are perused by countless numbers of inquirers in every part of Christendom; and though the common sense of mankind is in itself sufficient to show the falsity of Christianity, yet the writings alluded to have a powerful tendency to confirm the inquirer in his unbiassed conclusions.

It would be useless to deny, however, that the Christian religion is upheld by potent supports. It has arrayed in its defence the far greater portion of the wealth, learning, and talent, of the nations; for money will always purchase the two latter; and the church militant is little scrupulous as to the means whereby its dominancy is secured. But this comparatively prosperous state of the Christian religion, affords no evidence of its *truth*, and no guarantee for its continuance. The majority of mankind are now aroused to the task of inquiry, instead of resting in servile acquiescence; and even were there not in all Christendom a single dissenter from the common creed, still the argument of its dominancy would be a weak one, since five-sixths of the human race reject it as an imposture. The plea would be much stronger if urged in behalf of political tyranny; for despotism reigns undisputed over three-fourths of the habitable globe, and various attempts to shake it from its seat have been decisively defeated. Would the republican Christian permit the advocate of kingly supremacy to cite these facts in evidence of the excellence of that form of government; and as a proof that men will always continue to submit to it? And if he refuse to do this, with what consistency can he assume the same mode of argument in defence of Christianity? From the earliest period of time to which our knowledge extends, men have been enslaved by kings and priests. It may continue to be so, hereafter; but surely the prospect of overthrowing tyranny and delusion, is fairer now than it ever was at any former period.

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*Baltimore Association of Liberals.*—The following is the account of the proceedings of the friends of liberal principles in Baltimore, referred to in our last:—

At a meeting of the friends of liberal principles, held at the residence of Mr. John Haslam, on the 15th of March, 1829, it was *resolved* to form a society for the acquisition and diffusion of useful knowledge; when the following Preamble and Constitution were adopted:

*Preamble.*—Every candid mind must admit that the acquisition of just knowledge, and its application to just practice, furnish the only means by which the happiness of the human family can be permanently advanced or secured—and also, that such knowledge can only be acquired where perfect freedom of enquiry is allowed and encouraged. Every person admitting these principles, contemplating the present state of society, and seeing the most abundant resources for happiness laid waste—or what is worse, transformed into fruitful sources of misery, must sympathize with suffering humanity, and endeavor to ameliorate its condition.

Being ourselves influenced by these sentiments, and desiring to become better acquainted with the causes of the evils which surround us,

we hereby agree to organize an association, whose special object it shall be to prosecute such enquiries as may promote the attainment of that information—and, at the same time, we respectfully invite the co-operation of others entertaining similar views.

In pursuing our investigations, we shall keep in view the following axioms, viz :

1st. That all inquiry, to be beneficial, should be free; untrammelled by the fetters either of prejudice, custom or authority.

2nd. That as practice has its origin in opinion, every opinion is a legitimate subject of free discussion.

3d. That when men contend for an exception to this rule, by holding up certain dogmas and creeds—as being of a nature too delicate or sacred for investigation, their motives, in thus attempting to trammel the minds of their fellows, should always be suspected; and their pretensions examined with the more rigid scrutiny.

In claiming a right to examine the good or evil tendency of the opinions, creeds or faith of others—we should be unjust did we not acknowledge that of our own to be equally a subject of enquiry. Indeed, when we reflect that our practice is necessarily influenced by our opinions, and our happiness or misery by our practice, it clearly appears that the examination of those opinions is the most important that can engage our attention. If they be founded in error, the fact should be known to us that we may abandon them—if in truth, that we may hold them fast; cherish and disseminate them.

Finally, with a view to ascertain, as far as possible, what conduces to happiness, that we may embrace it—and what to misery, that we may avoid it; it is our intention to consider any question which may arise, in relation to either the natural or moral world, as a fit topic for free, fearless and unlimited enquiry.

*Constitution.*—Art. 1st. Every person subscribing this Constitution, and conforming to the regulations and by-laws of the society, shall be considered a member.

Art. 2nd. There shall be a committee of seven members, chosen by the Society, to whom all applications for membership shall be referred for approval or rejection.

Art. 3d. The funds of the Association shall be applied to the support of a *Free Press*, a *Library*, and such other purposes as shall be, from time to time, by resolve directed.

Art. 4th. The officers of the society shall be a president, secretary, and treasurer, together with a committee of seven; of whom, the president, secretary, and treasurer shall be members. It shall be the business of this committee, to manage the affairs of the association, agreeably to the by-laws; which shall be framed by them and subject to the approval or rejection of the society.

Art. 5. The officers shall be elected by ballot, annually, by a majority of members present, a general meeting to be called for that purpose. They shall hold their offices for one year; and until the election next ensuing.

Art. 6th. This Constitution may be altered or amended, at a general meeting, by a vote of two-thirds of the members present—due notice of

the proposed change being given to all the members, at least one month previous to the meeting.

Published by order of the Association,

JOHN HASLAM, president.

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### MISCELLANEOUS.

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*St. Catharine of Sienna.*—St. Catharine often saw the devil. According to Ribadeneira, at six years old she knew the lives of the holy fathers and hermits by revelation, practised abstinence, and shut herself up with other children in a room, where they whipped themselves. At seven she offered herself to the Virgin as a spouse for her son. When marriageable, she refused the importunity of her parents to wed; and having cut off her hair to keep her vow, they made her a kitchen-maid; but her father, one day as he was praying in a corner, seeing the Holy Ghost sitting upon her head in the shape of a dove, she was released from drudgery, and was favored with a revelation from St. Dominick. She eat no meat, drank only water, and at last left off bread, sustaining herself by herbs alone; and her grace before meals was, "Let us go take the punishment due to this miserable sinner." She so mastered sleep, that she scarcely took any rest, and her bed was only boards. She wore around her body next to the skin a chain of iron, which sunk into her flesh. Three times a day, and for an hour and a half each time, she flogged herself with another iron chain, till great streams of blood ran down; and when she took the black and white habit of the order of St. Dominick she increased her mortification. For three years she never spoke, except at confession; never stirred out of her cell, but to go to the church; and set up all night watching—taking rest in the quire at matins only, and then lying upon the floor with a piece of wood under her head for a bolster. She was tempted by devils in a strange manner described by Ribadeneira; but to drive them away, she disciplined her body with the iron chain so much the more. When the fiend perceived he could make no impression on her virginal heart, he changed his battery.

She had undertaken to cure an old woman who had a cancer in her breast so loathsome, that no one would go near her; but by the devil's instigation, the old woman gave out that Catharine was not as good as she should be, and stuck to her point. Catharine, knowing the devil's tricks, would not desist; and, to do her honor, Christ appeared, and offered to her the choice of two crowns—one of pure gold, the other of thorns; she took the crown of thorns, pressed it so close upon her head, that it gave her great pain; and Christ commanded her to continue her attendance upon the woman, who, in consequence of a vision, confessed her calumny, to the great confusion of the devil. Ribadeneira says that after this, Christ appeared to her, "opened to her the wound in his side, and made her drink till she was so ravished that her soul was deprived of its functions." Her love and affection to Christ was so intense, that she was almost always languishing and sick; at last it took away her



life, and she was dead for four hours, in which time she saw strange things concerning heaven, hell, and purgatory. On a certain day he appeared to her, with his mother and other saints, and espoused her in a marvellous and singular manner; visited her almost continually with the greatest familiarity and affection, sometimes in their company, though ordinarily he came alone, and entertained her by reciting and singing psalms with her. Once as she was coming home from church, he appeared to her in the disguise of a pilgrim, and begged a coat of her; she returned to the church, and secretly taking off her petticoat, brought it to him, not knowing who he was. He asked her for a shirt; she bade him follow her home, and she gave him her shift. Not content with this, he requested more clothes of her, as well for himself as a companion; but as she had nothing else left, and was much afflicted, in the night he appeared to her as the pilgrim, and showing her what she had bestowed upon him in the garb he had assumed, promised to give her an invisible garment, which should keep her from all cold both of body and soul. One time she prayed to him to take from her her heart of flesh, and it seemed to her that he came, and opening her side, took out her heart, and carried it away with him. It appeared almost incredible to her confessor when she told him she had no heart; "Yet," says Ribadeneira, "that which happened afterwards was a certain argument of the truth; for, in a few days, Christ appeared to her in great brightness, holding in his hand a ruddy heart, most beautiful to behold, and coming to her, put it into her left side, and said, 'My daughter Catharine, now thou hast my heart instead of thy own;' and having said this, he closed up her side again, in proof whereof a scar remained in her side, which she often showed."

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*St. Philip Neri.*—He was born at Florence in 1515, became recluse when a child, dedicated himself to poverty, and became miraculously fervent. "The divine love," says Butler, "so much dilated the breast of our saints, that the gristle which joined the fourth and fifth ribs on the left side was broken, which accident allowed the heart and the larger vessels more play; in which condition he lived fifty years." According to the same authority, his body was sometimes raised from the ground during his devotions some yards high. Butler relates the same of St. Dunstan, St. Edmund, and many other saints, and says that "Calmet, an author still living, assures us that he knows a religious man who, in devout prayer, is sometimes involuntarily raised in the air, and remains hanging in it without any support; also that he is personally acquainted with a devout nun to whom the same had often happened." Butler thinks it probable that they themselves would not determine whether they were raised by angels, or by what other supernatural operation. He says, that Neri could detect hidden sins by the smell of the sinners. He died in 1595. The body of such a saint of course worked miracles.

St. Philip Neri founded the congregation or religious order of the Oratory, in 1551. The rules of this religious order savour of no small severity. By the "Institutions of the Oratory," (printed at Oxford, 1687) they are required to mix corporal punishments with their religious harmony:—"From the first of November to the feast of the resurrection,

their contemplation of celestial things shall be heightened by a concert of music; and it is also enjoined, that at certain seasons of frequent occurrence, they all whip themselves in the Oratory. After half an hour's mental prayer, the officers distribute whips made of small cords full of knots, put forth the children, if there be any, and carefully shutting the doors and windows, extinguish the other lights, except only a small candle so placed in a dark lantern upon the altar, that the crucifix may appear clear and visible, but not reflecting any light, thus making all the room dark: then the priest, in a loud and doleful voice, pronounceth the verse *Jube Domine benedicere*, and going through an appointed service, comes *Apprehendite disciplinam*, &c.; at which words, taking their whips, they scourge their naked bodies during the recital of the 50th Psalm, *Miserere*, and the 129th, *De profundis*, with several prayers; at the conclusion of which, upon a sign given, they end their whipping and put on their clothes in the dark and in silence."

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**Free Press Association.**—The meetings of the Association are now held in the Bowery Long Room, opposite the Theatre, every Sunday afternoon, at 3 o'clock, for lectures; and in the evening, at 7 o'clock for debates.

The second of a series of lectures on the proofs of the existence of Jesus Christ, and the origin of Christianity, will be delivered to-morrow afternoon—by Mr. Houston.

In the evening, a debate will take place on the following question:—*Is the Christian religion better calculated to promote happiness and good order in society than any other system?*

Tickets of admission to the debate, (to be had at the door) three cents each. Ladies free.

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The friends of liberal principles throughout the United States, are respectfully requested to accept of the agency of the *Correspondent*. Four volumes are now completed, and sets can be had from the commencement.

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